

Commencement Address
The Honorable John Boehner
Speaker, U.S. House of Representatives
June 12, 2011

WELL, THANK YOU FOR THAT WARM WELCOME. GRADUATES, THIS IS A GLORIOUS DAY IN THE LIFE OF THE UNIVERSITY, AND A SIGNIFICANT MILESTONE IN YOUR LIFE.

WHEN I RECEIVED YOUR INVITATION I WASN'T SURE YOU HAD THE RIGHT GUY. THREE RECIPIENTS TODAY, ONE HAS ARGUED CASES BEFORE THE UNITED STATES SUPREME COURT. ONE IS CONSIDERED TO BE A LEADING EXPERT IN -- LET ME GET THIS RIGHT -- PHARMACO ECONOMICS. AND THE OTHER ONE IS JUST THE SON OF A BAR OWNER FROM CINCINNATI. SO IT IS TRUE WHAT THEY SAY. THIS TOO COULD HAPPEN TO YOU.

YES, I DO HAVE 11 BROTHERS AND SISTERS. MY MOTHER'S APPLICATION FOR SAINTHOOD IS STILL PENDING. BUT GROWING UP WITH LOVING PARENTS, WE BELIEVED THAT WE OUGHT TO HAVE A CHANCE AT A DECENT EDUCATION GOT US READY TO TAKE ON THE CHALLENGES OF THE WORLD. I WORKED MY WAY THROUGH XAVIER UNIVERSITY, AND I WAS IN THAT GROUP THAT WAS PLUS SIX YEARS. FOR THOSE OF YOU THAT ARE HERE, YOU'LL UNDERSTAND. TAKE OVER A STRUGGLING BUSINESS, TURNED IT INTO A SUCCESSFUL ONE. GOT MY NEIGHBORHOOD HOMEOWNERSHIP ASSOCIATION ALONG THE WAY AND ENDED UP IN THE UNITED STATES CONGRESS. THIS TOO COULD HAPPEN TO YOU.

NOW I'VE BEEN HUMBLLED BY MY COLLEAGUES AND CHOSEN BY THEM TO BE THE SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE. IT IS AN HONOR TO BE THE SPEAKER. SOMEONE HAS TO BE IN CHARGE. A LONG TIME AGO I DECIDED I SHOULD TRY TO DO THAT. BUT I'VE LEARNED A FEW LESSONS ALONG THE PATH OF LIFE AND THE PATH OF MY CAREER.

FIRST LESSON, HARD WORK. I PLAYED FOOTBALL AT ALOHA -- A LITTLE HIGH SCHOOL CALLED CINCINNATI HIGH SCHOOL, PLAYED FOOTBALL FOR A GUY NAMED JERRY FAUST THAT TAUGHT US A LOT OF LESSONS. ONE OF THE LESSONS HE TAUGHT US IS THERE'S NOTHING IN THIS WORLD YOU CAN'T ACCOMPLISH, NOTHING YOU CAN'T SUCCEED AT IF YOU'RE WILLING TO WORK HARD ENOUGH AND IF YOU'RE WILLING AND ABLE TO MAKE THE SACRIFICES THAT ARE NECESSARY. THAT LESSON HAS WORKED WELL THROUGHOUT MY LIFE AND THROUGHOUT MY CAREER, AND I DO BELIEVE IT WILL MEMBER YOU AS WELL.

YOU'VE ALREADY PUT IN AN AWFUL LOT OF HARD WORK, GRADUATES. AND GETTING YOURSELF HERE TODAY AND GETTING YOUR DEGREE. THERE'S NO LIMIT TO WHAT YOU CAN ACCOMPLISH IN AMERICA, BECAUSE

THIS IS AMERICA, THE GREATEST COUNTRY IN THE WORLD WITH MORE OPPORTUNITIES THAN ANYWHERE ELSE IN THE WORLD.

SECOND LESSON I'D SHARE WITH YOU AS A WORD. JUST ONE WORD CALLED "HUMILITY."

I'VE GOT A BIG FANCY TITLE. I'VE MOVED AROUND FOR LOTS OF DIFFERENT REASONS. BUT IT'S JUST ME. I'M NEVER GOING TO LET THIS JOB BECOME ANYTHING OTHER THAN WHAT IT SHOULD BE. MY JOB IS NOT TO TAKE THIS TITLE TO MY HEAD. MY JOB IS TO LISTEN TO MY COLLEAGUES AND TO LISTEN TO THE AMERICAN PEOPLE. YOU KNOW, LIFE ISN'T ALWAYS ABOUT YOU. I'M A BIG BELIEVER THAT EVERYTHING IN LIFE IS A TWO-WAY STREET. AND BEING USEFUL TO OTHERS, BEING INVOLVED IN YOUR COMMUNITY, FINDING SOME WAY TO SERVE IS PART OF WHAT I WOULD DESCRIBE AS HUMILITY.

MY FATHER WOULD WORK 10 OR 12 HOURS A DAY. WE DIDN'T HAVE MUCH. BUT LITERALLY FOUR OR FIVE NIGHTS A WEEK MY FATHER WAS VOLUNTEERING, PROVIDING AN EXAMPLE TO ME AND MY BROTHERS AND SISTERS THAT YOU CAN SERVE AND THAT YOU SHOULD HELP YOUR FELLOW CITIZENS. SO BEFORE YOU THINK ABOUT WHAT YOU WANT TO DO IN YOUR LIFE, I WOULD SUGGEST THIS TO ALL OF YOU. THINK ABOUT WHO YOU WANT TO BE BEFORE YOU THINK ABOUT WHAT YOU WANT TO BE. MOST PEOPLE IN LIFE NEVER REALLY LEARN THIS. THEY THINK LIFE IS ALL ABOUT THEM ALL OF THE TIME. BUT I THINK THAT'S A DEAD-END STREET. SO REMEMBER, LIFE IS A TWO-WAY STREET. AND THINK ABOUT WHO YOU ARE. BECAUSE WHEN YOU THINK ABOUT WHO YOU ARE IT WILL HELP LEAD YOU TO WHAT YOU WANT TO BE.

THE LAST POINT I'D MAKE, THE LESSONS OF LIFE, PERSEVERANCE. THOSE OF YOU THAT ARE GRADUATING -- YOU SHOWED AN AWFUL LOT OF PERSEVERANCE ALREADY IN GETTING YOURSELF THROUGH THIS UNIVERSITY AND GETTING YOUR DEGREE TODAY. I REMEMBER IT WAS JUST A FEW SHORT YEARS AGO -- OR AT LEAST IT FELT LIKE -- WHEN I WAS SITTING WHERE YOU WERE. THE DAYS ARE LONG, BUT THE YEARS GO BY QUICKLY. JUST ASK YOUR PARENTS. ALONG THE LINES OF PERSEVERANCE, I'VE HAD MY UPS AND DOWNS. I'VE HAD TO STRUGGLE MY WAY TO GET THROUGH SCHOOL. I HAD TO STRUGGLE IN MY BUSINESS CAREER.

I CAN REMEMBER THE YEARS IN POLITICS, 1990 AS A FIRST-TIME CANDIDATE. WHEN YOU BEGIN TO GO OUT THERE AND ASK PEOPLE TO VOTE FOR YOU, THEY'RE PROBABLY NOT GOING TO VOTE FOR YOU IF THEY CAN'T SAY YOUR NAME. YOU KNOW, MY NAME LOOKS LIKE BEANER, BONNER, BONER. THANK GOD IT WAS NOT -- WEINER.

BUT I WAS LOCKED IN A POLITICAL CONTEST THAT I COULDN'T WIN. WHY? BECAUSE MY OPPONENT'S NAME WAS TOM KINDNESS. BUT I WORKED HARD.

NO ONE THOUGHT I COULD WIN. BUT I WORKED HARD. OUTWORKED, OUTHUSTLED MY OPPONENTS AND EVENTUALLY WON. IN 1998 I'D BEEN IN CONGRESS EIGHT YEARS. I WAS IN THE REPUBLICAN LEADERSHIP. I WAS AS BIG UP AND COMER. AND GUESS WHAT HAPPENED? I LOST MY CONFIDENCE -- THE CONFIDENCE OF MY COLLEAGUES. I WAS LOST ON ME. AND AS A RESULT, I LOST MY LEADERSHIP POST.

I COULD HAVE QUIT. I COULD HAVE GONE BACK AND RUN MY BUSINESS. BUT I DECIDED I WAS GOING TO STAY. AND I WAS GOING TO WORK MY WAY BACK SO THAT I COULD HAVE A CHANCE TO DO WHAT I'M DOING TODAY. I WAS NEVER GOING TO LET THEM SEE ME SWEAT. I WAS NEVER GOING TO SEE AN OUNCE -- LET THEM SEE AN OUNCE OF DISAPPOINTMENT ON MY FACE. BUT IF YOU WORK HARD, YOU CAN PERSEVERE.

AND I WOULD JUST ALWAYS REMINDED OF WHAT MY PARENTS TAUGHT ME, THE SAME LESSON I TAUGHT TO MY KIDS AND THE SAME LESSON I TEACH TO MY COLLEAGUES VERY OFTEN. IF YOU DO THE RIGHT THINGS FOR THE RIGHT REASONS, GOOD THINGS WILL HAPPEN. SO IN THE END, I'M JUST A SON OF A BAR OWNER, JUST TRYING TO MAKE THE MOST OF THE BLESSINGS AND THE OPPORTUNITIES THAT I'VE BEEN GIVEN.

DO ME A FAVOR. THINK ABOUT THIS. NOT TODAY, NOT TONIGHT, NOT TOMORROW, BUT THINK ABOUT THESE THINGS THAT I'VE SHARED WITH YOU. AND MAYBE YOU CAN BEGIN WITH THIS. SIT DOWN AND WRITE A NOTE TO YOUR PARENTS OR TO YOUR LOVED ONE, WHOEVER IT WAS THAT GUIDED YOU AND HELPED YOU GET THROUGH THIS. NO E-MAIL, NO FACEBOOK MESSAGE, CERTAINLY NO TWEET. JUST A PEN AND A PIECE OF PAPER. SIT DOWN AND WRITE A NOTE TO SAY, "THANK YOU FOR THOSE WHO GOT YOU HERE."

SO THERE YOU HAVE IT. HARD WORK, HUMILITY, PERSEVERANCE. AND IF YOU'RE A LITTLE BIT LIKE ME, DON'T BE AFRAID TO SHED A TEAR OF JOY AND BLESSINGS AND HAPPINESS FOR ALL THE BLESSINGS AND GOOD THINGS THAT HAVE COME YOUR WAY IN LIFE. THANK YOU ALL VERY MUCH.